

Opening Statement of Rep. Rush Holt  
Natural Resources Full Committee Oversight Hearing  
Entitled "DOI Hydraulic Fracturing Rule: A Recipe for Government Waste, Duplication and  
Delay."  
May 7, 2013

Across the United States, natural gas reserves now accessible through the use of hydraulic fracturing techniques have the potential to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, lessen pollution that leads to global warming, reshape our manufacturing sector, and boost our economy. In fact, we are now producing more natural gas in America under President Obama than we ever have before. But we must ensure that we develop this resource safely and in a way that protects the environment.

According to the Interior Department, 90 percent of all new wells drilled on public lands now employ hydraulic fracturing. As a result, the Interior Department has begun the process of conducting a rulemaking to govern the safety of hydraulic fracturing on public lands.

The Republican Majority has claimed that federal regulation of this rapidly expanding drilling technique on America's public lands is not needed because states already have regulations in place. But state regulations vary widely in their requirements, the stringency of those requirements, and the efficacy with which they are implemented. That is why it is important for the Interior Department to put in place a regulatory floor to ensure that there are minimum protections in place on public lands in all states.

And despite the claims of the Majority, these protections for hydraulic fracturing would be implemented on a state-by-state basis by local Bureau of Land Management offices in a way that dovetails with existing state regulations. But they will guarantee a minimal level of safety and environmental protection in all states.

These public lands belong to the American people and the Interior Department has a responsibility to ensure that companies drilling on them are doing so safely and that our air and water is protected. We already know that oil and gas companies are committing serious safety violations when drilling on public lands -- 20 percent of the thousands of safety violations committed by oil and gas companies drilling on public lands onshore over the last decade were related to the blowout prevent or other well control equipment. Moreover, the current drilling regulations that companies repeatedly violate for well construction have not been updated in nearly 25 years and reflect neither the significant technological advances of hydraulic fracturing nor the tremendous growth in its use.

I continue to have concerns that the fracking rule issued by the Interior Department will not be strong enough to appropriately protect public health and safety. Last year, I joined Ranking Member Markey and a number of Democrats on the Committee in writing the Interior Department to urge that the draft rule be strengthened in a number of key areas such as public disclosure and availability of information, management of waste water and well construction.

Yet under the intense pressure from the oil and gas industry and their allies in Congress, the Interior Department appears to be making the fracking rule weaker, not stronger. Earlier this year, the Interior Department announced that it would take the unusual step of revising the draft fracking rule it had proposed last year. A leaked version of that revision appears to indicate that the proposal may weaken requirements in these three key areas. That is extremely troubling and I will continue to closely monitor this rulemaking to ensure that the final product is sufficiently protective.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and I yield back.